

PLEASANTON WEEKLY

Vol. II, Number 50 • January 3, 2003

www.PleasantonWeekly.com

It's all about Pleasanton

More commuter choices for 2003

A new business/government partnership, the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative, is dramatically improving the way people get to and from work. Pleasanton and the Tri-Valley Resource Team on Clean Air are assisting by offering technical assistance, public recognition and promotion, training and forums for information exchange. Commuter Choice also offers tax benefits for employers and employees who participate in the program while providing a greater array of choices to reduce commute time and cost and with a substantial contribution to the environment.

James Paxson, general manager of the Hacienda Owners Association, is a leader in this effort. He points out that the program means commute alternatives can be used at a discount as the dollars used toward the alternatives come tax free. Given the wide variety of commute choices to Pleasanton work sites, the ways in which these dollar savings can be realized in 2003 are greater than ever. These choices include BART, buses, ACE trains, vanpools, carpools and even telecommuting. Under the federal tax code, employers can now offer their employees up to \$100 per month in tax-free benefits for transit and vanpool passes. Alternatively, employees can set aside up to \$100 per month pre-tax for these types of commute expenses. Neither the

employer nor the employee pay payroll or income taxes on the benefit amount.

Along with the city of Pleasanton, companies in our community that will be participating in the program in the coming year include Paychex, PeopleSoft, Inc., ProBusiness and California Indemnity Insurance Company. Aetna US Healthcare in San Ramon now has 220 employees in its rideshare program, offering participating employees up to five days of paid time off each year by using a commute alternative. The company also offers free bus passes, a guaranteed ride home in case of a family emergency, free shuttle rides to public transit stations, preferred parking, bicycle parking, showers and lockers.

Commuter Choice is offering cutting-edge commuter benefits that also include:

- **Attracting and retaining employees:** In the competitive job market that Pleasanton's growth businesses face even in today's uncertain marketplace, offering a first-rate benefits package can be an important part of an employer's strategy. Studies show that 86 percent of workers consider commuter benefits as among the most valuable. Companies here and elsewhere that are participating in the program are finding that Commuter Choice reduces employee absen-

teeism, employee turnover and increases productivity.

- **Solving parking challenges and cost:** To accommodate employees, companies must either rent space or build their own parking lots close to the workplace. It is estimated that employers in the United States spend up to \$70 billion annually to provide parking for their employees, the same amount spent each year to construct and maintain all of the country's highways and bridges. Commuter Choice alternatives can significantly reduce those costs.

Instigating programs that provide commuting benefits as some Pleasanton companies are now doing demonstrates leadership. These programs can influence the bottom line and employee job satisfaction and help the environment. In addition, these employers are receiving local and national recognition for their participation. With automobile emissions representing one of the primary causes of air quality degradation in the Tri-Valley, Paxson and the Tri-Valley Resource Team in Clean Air deserve the support of all businesses in our community in this Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. For more information, access the team's Web site at www.sparetheair.org/resourceteams.htm on the Internet or www.commuterchoice.gov.